Custom Contracting, Inc.
"your neighborhood remodeler"

Your Neighborhood Remodeler

Established in 1990
Volume 43 – December 2014

Is a Large-Scale Renovation / Addition Right for You?

You like your neighbors. You like the community, including the schools. It's a good commute to work. But while you're attached to your home in many ways, it needs major work. What do you do — move or stay where you are? And if you stay where you are, do you tear down the house and build a new one from scratch, or renovate what you've already got?

Many homeowners come to the point where they're facing that last issue: the choice between a tear-down and a large-scale renovation / addition. Often times, it's not any easy decision to make.

At Custom Contracting, we've worked with several homeowners who concluded that a large-scale renovation / addition made sense. Here's some perspective behind their thinking.

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Weighing the Costs

As you can imagine, making major renovations generally costs a lot less than tearing down an existing structure and rebuilding.

And with that investment, you can make signifcant enhancements. For example:

- Taking down walls and opening up spaces
- Adding new living space
- Reconfiguring the layout
- Upgrading the electricity, plumbing, HVAC, etc.
- Improving the energy efficiency

(It's also worth noting that renovations are usually more eco-friendly because they don't require as much lumber and other materials.)

The Lemieux/Wolfe home – after.

After running the numbers, Arlington's Mark Druy and Johanna Rothman (featured in this issue's Client Spotlight) found a large-scale renovation was clearly the way to go.

The Lemieux/Wolfe home – before.

"The house we bought [which Custom subsequently renovated] had enough for us to work with," says Mark. "This was a more logical path for us than tearing down what was a perfectly good structure and then paying for demolition, removal and new construction. Why not take something with good potential and make it work for you and what you need?"

Custom clients Carrie Lemieux and Richard Wolfe considered buying another home because they needed more space for their growing family. They wanted to stay in their neighborhood, but few homes were on the market. And those homes that were available, they felt, were either too big or overpriced because of the extensive renovations needed.

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Management Memo: Qualified for the Big Projects

President Bill Farnsworth, general manager Scott Blain.

As you can tell, large-scale home renovations are the theme of this issue of our newsletter. We'd like to take this opportunity to explain why Custom is particularly well-qualified to handle this size of a project.

First and foremost, experience really matters. And Custom has been remodeling area homes for nearly 25 years. Our experience comes into play in countless ways.

For example, we can walk you through all the important questions you should be considering. What are your key goals? How do you prioritize these goals? How long do you plan to live in the home? Answering questions like these can shed light on what type of remodeling solution is right for you. (Or, perhaps, whether you're better off selling the house and moving instead.)

Budget is another important factor to weigh. Having completed hundreds of remodeling projects since 1990, we can call on historical data to give you quick, accurate estimates of what various types of work will cost. That means fewer surprises in the form of additional costs once the project is underway.

Experience and a Great Team

If you choose to proceed with a large-scale renovation / addition, our experience continues to be useful. Both president Bill Farnsworth and general manager Scott Blain are skilled in drawing up project plans, sometimes eliminating the need to hire an architect (as the homeowners in this issue's Client Spotlight discovered).

Our in-house design expertise is another valuable asset, as we can guide you through kitchen and bath layout and cabinet and countertop selections. (On that note, we're also a direct supplier of two kitchen and bath cabinet lines, allowing for one-stop shopping.) Our Certified Lead Carpenters, meanwhile, are skilled not only in carpentry, but also in managing even the biggest remodeling projects. And they're supported by a network of talented trade partners, meaning we can cover everything that goes into your project — electricity, plumbing, roofing, painting and more.

Lastly, we have a large office staff at our headquarters on Massachusetts Avenue in Arlington Heights. From a project coordinator who can assist with product selection to a receptionist ready to put you in touch with the right team member, we're strongly committed to great customer service — for projects big and small.

Is a Large-Scale Renovation / Addition Right for You?,
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"This led us to explore the option of a major renovation to our existing home," says Carrie. "Increasing the value of our home, not going through the home buying/selling process and being able to custom design something that fit our needs became the most attractive option.

"We spoke to three contractors and ultimately chose Custom because they spent time in the proposal phase to paint a vision for what we could accomplish, which created a level of comfort to give us the confidence to jump into a major renovation."

Deciding on a Plan

What will your large-scale renovation / addition look like? Based on our experience, common scenarios include:

- Sticking with the current footprint or making a major addition that adds living space
- Converting a Cape to a colonial with a full walk-up attic
- Finishing the basement and updating the bedrooms
- Adding a new family room with a master suite above it

As you work through the various options, Custom can provide valuable assistance in terms of estimating budget, evaluating alternative solutions and much more.

Understanding Possible Roadblocks

Depending on the community in which you live, external factors may eliminate a tear-down from consideration. For instance, if you live in an officially designated historic home or historic district, you may be prohibited from tearing down the structure. And if you don't live in a historic home, zoning issues, building codes and conservation issues may present the same limitation.

Of course, some of these factors may impact a large-scale renovation / addition, too. For example, the following clause applies to Arlington homes designated as historical: "If you are proposing exterior changes
to your house that affect more than 25 percent of a front or side elevation, then the town by-law requires that the Historical Commission review your plans in a public hearing."

Again, Custom is here to help you navigate possible roadblocks like these. In addition, we have the project management experience that's essential in successfully completing a large-scale renovation / addition (this issue's Management Memo has more thoughts on that topic).

No matter what size remodeling project that's on your mind, though, we'd be happy to discuss it. Give us a call at 781-648-2835 to get started.

Client Spotlight: The Druy/Rothman Home

When Mark Druy and Johanna Rothman decided their two-story colonial didn't fit their lifestyle anymore, they came up with an unconventional solution. Custom Contracting helped the couple make it work.

Mark and Johanna had called Arlington home for 26 years and didn't want to live anywhere else. What they wanted was a house that had most of the living space on one floor.

After searching around town for a while, Mark and Johanna found just what they were looking for: a 1950s ranch that needed a little TLC, but could be renovated to fit their needs. They completed the purchase in November 2013.

No Architect Required

During their home search, Mark and Johanna occasionally consulted with Custom general manager Scott Blain. We had done some work for them in the past, and they wanted Scott's opinion on various properties they saw. Once they bought the new home, they worked with Scott for a couple months to draw up a plan for the renovation.

"We were able to get through that process without even hiring an architect," says Mark. "Scott has a great ability to walk through the house, discuss ideas and translate all of that into drawings. That's one thing I like about working with Custom — they listen, and then take what you talk about and make it a reality."

Johanna adds, "One of Custom's key strengths is their ability to quickly iterate on design changes during the planning process, and they got it right for everything we wanted."

The scope of work for this project was enormous. The new addition includes a roughly 18' x 34' kitchen (with walk-in pantry) and family room attached to the back of the home and garage. A new mudroom connects the garage to the house. A new elevator (we installed the shaft) goes from the living room to the basement. Renovating the main floor involved transforming a bedroom into a master suite; gutting the two bathrooms; adding a laundry room and more closet space; HVAC, electrical and plumbing work; and much more. Downstairs, we renovated and reconfigured the basement to create space for an exercise room, den study and full bathroom.

"We were looking to have about 2,200 square feet on a single floor, which is about the amount of living space we had on two floors in our old house," says Mark. "That's what we've managed to do here, with help from Custom."

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Client Spotlight: The Druy/Rothman Home

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Very Satisfied with the Final Result

Mark loved working with the Custom team, starting with Scott early on and then with designer Nikki DeFelice and lead carpenter Dave Surrette. Nikki played a major role in designing the new kitchen.

"We worked with Nikki through several iterations of the kitchen, and she had really great ideas," says Mark. "If we didn't like something she suggested, she'd adapt. She wasn't stuck on designing the kitchen she wanted to design. She listened to us to design the kitchen we wanted."

As for Dave, he was onsite every working day for about five months — so Mark and Johanna got to know him well. "He was fantastic," says Mark. "Nothing was ever a problem, and he never showed any signs of stress. If anything came up, he took care of it right away. And he has an excellent crew around him, too."

Having moved in to the home in June, Mark and Johanna are settling in and enjoying their life in a different part of Arlington.

"We couldn't be more pleased not only with the outcome, but also the process of working with Custom," says Mark. "Everyone within that organization is just first-rate."

News from **Custom Contracting's** Kitchen & Bath Design Center

We are a full-service design/build remodeling company that designs, supplies and installs our own cabinet lines as part of our kitchen-and-bath remodeling process.

Understanding Your Motivations

By Nikki DeFelice

Our clients have a variety of motivations for remodeling their kitchen and/or bathrooms. Scenarios range from a growing family that needs more space to a couple who's finally ready to build out their dream kitchen or bath.

Regardless of what motivates the homeowners, the key to creating a successful kitchen or bath plan is learning how they live in and use their space. From the first meeting and site visit, here's a look at the types of questions we might ask to understand your goals:

Kitchen

- Are you a gourmet chef or baker? That will influence such factors as oven and ranges, countertop surfaces, storage options and general floor space.
- What appliances are important to you? Before designing a floor plan, we need to know what you have in mind (e.g. double fridge, standup freezer, commercial range) and make sure they fit the flow of the room.
- Do you like entertaining? If so, you'll want an open floor plan, an island to gather around, lots of counter space, storage for large platters and glassware, etc.
- Is family time a priority? That is, do you want to provide a functional space where the family can gather for years to come?

Custom Contracting designer Nikki DeFelice graduated from Endicott College with a degree in interior design and has worked in interior and kitchen/bath design for about 20 years. Part of our team since 2001, she is responsible for kitchen/bath design along with selecting and ordering cabinetry and countertops.

Bath

- Do you need more privacy? If mom and dad want space of their own, carving out a master suite might help.
- Does "aging in place" appeal to you? It may be time to start thinking about options that will bring you through retirement without sacrificing style or function.
- Do you consider the bath to be a sanctuary? Soaking tubs, air jets, aromatherapy and a walk-in shower with multiple showerheads might all be considerations.
- Is the bath not up to par with the rest of the home? Perhaps an update will bring everything in line.

At Custom, we have almost 25 years of experience understanding what homeowners want and working through the design elements of kitchen and bath projects. Our in-house design capabilities — and the fact that we're a direct dealer for two cabinet lines — give us the ability to design the kitchen and/or bath of your dreams within a realistic budget.

Kitchen & Bath Tidbits – Dishwasher Cleaning/Maintenance

Ever feel like your dishwasher just isn't cleaning like it used to? Finding residue after a wash? We found some great DIY tips at www.homerepairtutor.com. (Take a moment to visit the site and check out photos/video, too.)

- Remove and unclog spray arms. Refer to your user manual or look online for tips on removing. Once removed, use picture wire or pipe cleaners like dental floss to clean out the holes.
- Soak the spray arms in white vinegar to remove soap and scale buildup.
- Clean the inside of the dishwasher. Check the bottom for any debris or big particles that could prevent the tub from draining. Remove the coarse filter and check the reservoir. There's also a fine filter, typically round with mesh sections. Wipe clean with a sponge and run hot water through it to remove fine particles that can build up.
- If you can, lift the fine filter and clean out build-up beneath. Make a paste of vinegar and baking soda, let it soak and then gently scrape/clean with a putty knife or steel wool.
- Use a toothbrush to scrub around the rubber seals and perimeter of where the door meets up with the tub. Wipe down with a wet sponge. Don't forget the soap dispenser cups.

Now that it's clean, here are a few pointers to keep it running smoothly.

- Run the garbage disposal before starting the dishwasher. The dishwasher drains into the same pipe as your sink, so that drain must be clear.
- Run hot water in your sink before running the dishwasher. You'll get cleaner dishes if the water starts hot. (Collect the water you run and use it for watering plants or other purposes.)
- Make sure the water starts hot enough. Set the thermostat on your water heater to 120°F. Water that is cooler than this won't do a good job cleaning. Water that is hotter could scald.
- Run full loads to conserve water and energy, but don't pack dishes too tightly. Dishwashers wash dishes by spraying water over them, so the water needs to be able to get to the dishes to clean them.
- If you're inclined to pre-wash your dishes before putting them in the dishwasher, consider this: Dishwasher detergent needs a certain amount of grease and dirt to do its job. Otherwise, it actually foams up during the cycle, which is not good for your dishwasher.

News from **Custom Contracting's** Kitchen & Bath Design Center

Featured Bath & Kitchen

A total demo and renovation created this beautiful, spacious and functional kitchen. The new window, back entry, custom built-in benches, island, cabinetry, desk area and new appliances gave the homeowner everything they wanted. **Cabinetry, including built-in corner benches**, is Legacy (product of Bertch Custom) "Royal" full-overlay doors and slab drawer fronts. The cabinets are made of white birch, with a semi-gloss painted finish in eggshell. The **island** is a contrasting brindle cherry stain. The **countertop** is Serpentine Marble in Rainforest Green. **Plumbing fixtures** include a Houzer MGS stainless steel sink, Kohler Forte single-hole pull-out faucet, along with a separate Kohler faucet with a filter system and a Whitehaus instant hot-water system. **New appliances** include stainless GE Profile refrigerator, KitchenAid cabinet-front compactor, XO above-range hood and dual fuel Electrolux range. **Lighting** is a combination of recessed, pendant and under-cabinet. A **backsplash** of 3x6 subway Florida tile and a warm finished red oak **flooring** round out the room.

This master bath has been updated both in design and functionality, starting with **bath fixtures** like a Whirlpool, Maxx air-jet alcove tub unit, Hansgrohe Raindance shower valve system with diverter for handheld, and custom-made, semi-frameless, swinging glass panel **shower door**. Winchester 5x5 ceramic tile in the color "lace" makes up the **tub/shower tile surround** with a deco row of 5x5 topped with 2x5 tiles in contrasting color "straw" with recessed niches. **Accessories** include chrome grab bar and towel bar (not shown: Myson 8-bar electric towel warmer). Opposite the tub is a **double vanity and toilet topper** by Legacy (product of Bertch Custom), full-overlay Quincy style doors/drawers in semi-gloss Fawn stain on white birch with wood-trimmed vanity mirror/medicine **cabinets** and two 3-light **wall sconces** by Kichler. The **countertop/tub end wall cap** are Giallo Ornamentale granite with white porcelain undermount **sinks** and Grohe Eurodisc Cosmopolitan **faucets**. Finishing off the room is Timeless Crema Marfil 13x13 (on diagonal) ceramic tile on the **floor**.

Only the Best

No matter what you have in mind for your cabinetry, Custom can help you with product selection, design and installation. Custom sells cabinets from two of the best manufacturers out there: **Bertch,** and now **Touchstone**.

Bertch®

We've been affiliated with **Bertch Cabinet Manufacturing** for over 15 years, and it's been a great relationship. This family owned and operated manufacturer, based in Waterloo, Iowa, offers a wide array of traditional and contemporary custom, semi-custom and stock cabinet choices for your home. Bertch produces all of its components in the USA. Learn more at www.bertch.com.

We partnered with **Touchstone Fine Cabinetry** in 2014 for the wide-ranging options and solutions they can provide for our clients. Using only the best materials, the latest technologies and the artful craftsmanship responsible for furniture-quality cabinets, they can build any type of kitchen for us. Learn more about Touchstone (located in North Carolina) by visiting www.touchstonefinecabinetry.com.

Touchstone
FINE CABINETRY

Subcontractor's Corner with Adam Kersnowski

Adam Kersnowski's masonry experience goes back to high school, when he began working for his future father-in-law, a mason. He started his own business in 2006, and it's now 17 people strong. While the company initially focused on masonry, it now balances that work with tiling.

We've brought on Adam for a number of projects over the past three years. He recently spoke with us about trends he's seeing in masonry and tiling.

Thin Stone Veneer

"Not so long ago, everyone was using cultured stone — a cement product — as a surface covering for things like fireplaces, chimneys, foundations, columns, backsplashes, etc. You could tell it was concrete, but it was the only option out there.

"Then, awhile back, companies started making thin stone veneer. This involves taking a natural thick stone and slicing about an inch off the face of it. You can use stone veneer as a surface covering on a variety of surfaces, inside or outside.

"A lot of homeowners like the look of stone veneer — it's real, after all — and it's available from more and more outlets. Cultured stone costs a lot less per square foot, and it's still popular in commercial building. But on the residential side, we're pretty much just laying stone veneer these days."

Bigger Tiles

"Manufacturers seem to have the technology to make tiles much bigger than before. You can even find tile panels that are 4' by 8'. And homeowners are responding positively.

"You might think that larger tiles make life easier for someone like me. But in fact, they make my job harder. The reason is, it takes a lot of prep work to make the substrate, which you lay the tile on, flat and even. Not getting the substrate right makes the job a nightmare.

"From the homeowner's perspective, larger tiles mean fewer grout lines. That means less upkeep. Though it's worth noting that grout technology has come a long way. Traditionally, grout has been cement-based. But we're seeing epoxy and urethane grouts that are much less susceptible to discoloration and staining. Epoxy and urethane are more expensive and labor-intensive to install, but they're worth it."

Shower Waterproofing

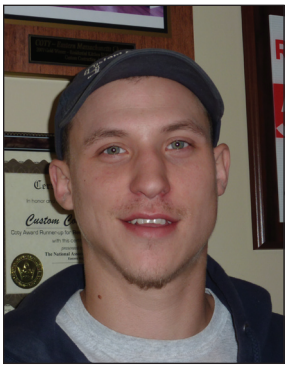
"I'm happy to say that shower waterproofing has come a long way in recent years. I've found there are more products out there that are easier to install and do a much better job.

"Traditionally, when installing a shower, you'd start with a copper pan or rubber membrane as the base. Next, you'd do a 'mud job' — pour in the cement and then pitch it toward the drain. Finally, if you wanted, you'd waterproof the walls and floor with a membrane before laying the tile on top.

"The problem was, water always managed to get down into the pan or membrane at the bottom. As a result, you'd see efflorescence — that is, mineral deposits — coming up through the tile.

"The systems available now — Wedi, Laticrete, Schulter — are solid foam pans that replace the copper pans or rubber membranes. They also eliminate the need for mud jobs, which avoids the problem of efflorescence. The waterproofing is simply a lot better."

Tom Blain Officially Joins Custom



We're pleased to welcome the latest member of our team, Tommy Blain. Tom, the son of general manager Scott Blain, has actually been involved with Custom for about two-and-a-half years, including the past year as a full-time apprentice carpenter. He's been learning a lot under the guidance of our entire production team.

A resident of Pepperell, Tom enjoys sports, fishing, playing guitar and spending time with family.

NARI Service Projects

Two members of the Custom team recently took part in Eastern Massachusetts National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI) service projects: Dave Surrette (building two homes in Lawrence through a Habitat for Humanity program) and Sean Farnsworth (remodeling a room for a chronically ill child through the Room to Dream Foundation).

Visit Custom Online

Check out custom-contracting.com to see our blog, a portfolio of our projects, an archive of past newsletters and client spotlights, and more. You can also find us online at:

Client Referral Program

Refer a friend, get a reward:

That's how our Client Referral Program works.

You qualify for this program when:

- someone calls in and says you referred them,
- a referral signs on with us for their project, or
- you serve as a reference to a prospective client.

There are other ways to qualify.

For more details, please call us at 781-648-2835.

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From the Office

Fourteen in a Row

Once again, Custom has been named to *Qualified Remodeler* magazine's Top 500 Remodelers List — the 14th time we've made it in 14 tries. This year, we placed 256th among U.S. remodeling firms. You can find the full list in the August issue of the magazine.

The annual Top 500 grades remodelers based on the following factors:

- Years in business
- Presence of a showroom
- Industry awards
- Industry certifications
- Community service/charitable work

Also in the Remodeling 550

Remodeling magazine has released its 2014 Remodeling 550 list, and Custom ranked 80th among full-service remodelers nationwide (up from 107th last year). The Remodeling 550 includes the largest home improvement companies in the United States, distinguishing among full-service remodelers, replacement contractors, franchise operations and insurance restoration businesses.

One More Certified Lead Carpenter

Sean Farnsworth has become Custom's latest Certified Lead Carpenter (CLC). This past summer, he completed the National Association of the Remodeling Industry's (NARI's) CLC course and passed the exam. He received his official certification at a NARI meeting in September.

Golfing for a Good Cause

Custom's Bill Farnsworth, Scott Blain and Elena Bartholomew took part in the 17th annual Eastern Massachusetts NARI Golf Tournament in September. The event, which also featured a raffle and auction, raised funds for the EM NARI Scholarship Program.